

Testimony for HB 5446 Sec 3

Safe Haven March 14, 2018

Four years ago, here at the LOB, I listened to an attorney testify. Her client, a 16-year-old schoolgirl, had gotten accidentally pregnant. Caught in a dilemma, she hid it from her family and friends. She created a web of lies for her enquiring teachers and counselors. In January 2007, alone in the bathroom, she delivered, panicked, and drowned her baby in the toilet. Charged with murder, she received an 18-year sentence and entered York CI.

To me, this seemed to be an overly harsh sentence. I suspected there was more to the story. With permission from her and her family, I pursued her case. First, I wondered what other girls were getting for this crime, called neonaticide, killing a baby within the first 24 hours. There was no registry for this, no tabulation. I went around Connecticut and came up with 10 more cases. Six were teens like her. This is important because these young girls are typically naive, single and isolated, hide the pregnancy, and may have cultural or religious taboos. We now know that during delivery they can go through a dissociative syndrome, with the tragic result. Sentences vary tremendously. A few serve no time and get counseling. But across the country, some, even teenagers, are sentenced to life in prison. If and when released, they go on to have normal lives. Recidivism is unheard of.

The ten cases were not easy to find—no doubt there are more. In fact, from studies, we know that, sadly, 2 to 3 times as many newborns are disposed of and never discovered.

The young woman was released after a clemency and is doing quite well. Three years ago, another, a 19 year old, showed up at UConn ED after she delivered at home and put her baby in a plastic bag. She served 1.5 years at York. Another woman, a Hispanic, today sits in York for the same crime. It is seen across all socioeconomic classes.

With all of them, one crucial element has been consistent. They were unaware of Safe Haven. Even their counselors at school did not inform them about it. One girl was two blocks from an Emergency Room, where she ended up minutes after it was too late.

Both of the released girls were instructed by their parole board and sentencing judge to work for Safe Haven, told to get the word to young girls out so this does not happen again. They would like to, but there is a disincentive. They are still vilified in the press.

Is it our decision we put part of the burden of educating our young girls and boys about Safe Haven on these two women—and have the schools play no role?

I urge you to pass this bill.

Thank you,

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